

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Pressroom for more information and/or downloadable images:  
[www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos](http://www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos)  
Program companion website: [www.pbs.org/everychildisbornapoet](http://www.pbs.org/everychildisbornapoet)*

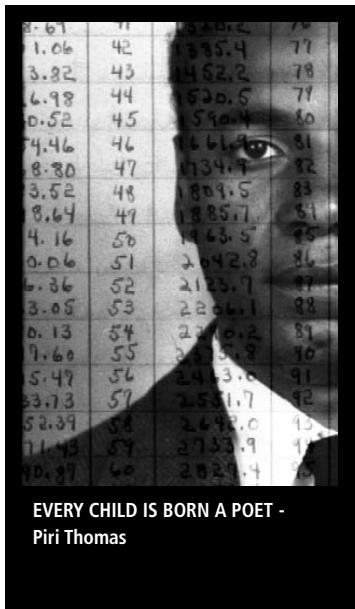
**INDEPENDENT LENS's "EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET" EXPLORES THE LIFE AND WORK OF AUTHOR AND ACTIVIST PIRI THOMAS**

*Film by Jonathan Robinson*

*Premieres Nationally on "Independent Lens,"  
ITVS's Acclaimed Series on PBS*

*April 6, 2004 at 10 P.M.  
(check local listings)*

*A Co-Presentation of Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB)*



*"I thought, 'God, I wanna get out of this hole. I promise if You help me climb out, I ain't gonna push the cover back on that cesspool. Please let me out and I'll push my arm back down there and help the others climb out.'" —PIRI THOMAS*

(San Francisco, CA) — An incendiary mix of documentary, poetry, story-telling, drama and performance, **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** explores the life and work of Piri Thomas, the 75-year-old Afro-Cuban-Puerto Rican author of the classic autobiographical novel **DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS** (1967). One of the landmarks of modern American literature, the novel continues to be taught widely today in schools for its groundbreaking bilingual style and its realistic portrayal of poverty, youth, violence, imprisonment and search for racial identity.

The book's author, Piri Thomas, the first writer of Puerto Rican ancestry to receive national recognition, is considered by many to be a cultural icon and community treasure. Thomas' writings, his poetry and his work as an educator have inspired and influenced generations of students, writers, artists and activists who have identified with his journey of struggle, self-discovery and transformation.

**EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** will air nationally on the PBS series *Independent Lens*, hosted by Don Cheadle, on Tuesday, April 6th at 10:00 P.M. (check local listings).



The film, like Piri's novel, traces Thomas' path from childhood to manhood in New York City's Spanish Harlem from the 1930s to the 1960s; his parents' immigrant experience, home life during the Great Depression, membership in barrio youth gangs, his struggle to come to terms with his mixed-race identity, travels as a teenage merchant marine, his heroin addiction, his notorious armed robbery of a Greenwich Village nightclub, his six years spent in prison and his emergence as a writer.

Piri Thomas is not, however, simply a writer. When Thomas started on his own path to self-reclamation and self-respect, he made a life-long commitment to help others do the same. Since the time of his release from prison in 1956 to this day, Thomas has devoted himself to the development, health and well-being of youths and young adults. As a social worker, he pioneered violence prevention and drug treatment efforts. As an educator, he has promoted literacy and sought to stimulate the growth of individual creative expression, not only as a means of human enrichment, but as a tool of individual and community survival. And as a poet, Thomas' rhythm and style pre-figured Rap by decades.

In the film, Thomas' coming-of-age story is counter-pointed with dramatizations, spoken word poetry performance sequences and vérité scenes of his ongoing work of 45 years as an educator and activist empowering marginalized and incarcerated youths.



A stylized, genre-spanning production, **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** includes a spellbinding collage of rare archival footage, still photographs and provocative mixed-media artwork, as it examines Thomas' use of creative expression as a means of confronting poverty, racism, violence and isolation. Pulsating with an original Latin Jazz score, **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** is a riveting portrait of a life lived through struggle, self-discovery and transformation.

The program's interactive companion website [www.pbs.org/everychildisbornapoet](http://www.pbs.org/everychildisbornapoet) features detailed information about the film, including an interview with the filmmaker, cast and crew bios, as well as links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a "talkback" section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film, and more.

**EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** is produced by When In Doubt Productions, Inc. in association with the Independent Television Service and Latino Public Broadcasting with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET** is a co-presentation of Independent Television Service and Latino Public Broadcasting.

### **EVERY CHILD IS BORN A POET Credits**

DIRECTOR / PRODUCER:	<b>Jonathan Robinson</b>
CO-PRODUCERS:	<b>Karen D. Davis &amp; Karen McCabe</b>
ARTWORK & STILL PHOTOGRAPHS:	<b>Juan Sanchez</b>
DIRECTORS OF PHOTOGRAPHY:	<b>Adam Beckman, Kev Robertson &amp; Alex Leyton</b>
MUSIC COMPOSER-PRODUCERS:	<b>Kip Hanrahan &amp; John Santos</b>
CASTING DIRECTOR / DRAMA CONSULTANT:	<b>Jeanette Torruella-Plaza</b>

### **AWARDS**

Opera Prima Award, Los Angeles Latino International Film Festival, 2003  
Honorable Mention, Best Documentary, Urbanworld Film Festival, 2003  
Nominee Distinguished Documentary Feature Award, IDA, 2003  
Nominee Silver Wolf Competition at the International Documentary Filmfestival Amsterdam (IDFA), 2003

### **PIRI THOMAS - WRITER / EDUCATOR / ACTIVIST**

Author Piri Thomas was born in New York's East Harlem in 1928. Considered one of the preeminent figures of *Nuyorican* literary culture, both Thomas' career and fame as an author were launched in 1967 with his autobiographical novel, *Down These Mean Streets* (Random House), detailing his coming of age in *El Barrio* in the 1930, '40s and '50s. *Down These Mean Streets* was cited by *The New York Times* (February 5, 1995) as being one of "The 10 Best Books About New York." The Spanish language edition of *Down These Mean Streets* was published in 1998 by Vintage Español. Thomas' other books include *Seven Long Times*, *Savior*, *Savior Hold My Hand* and *Stories from El Barrio*. Thomas' poetry and his style of delivery has influenced generations of writers and spoken word artists. Currently, Thomas travels all over the United States presenting dramatic readings and creative writing workshops in schools, universities, prisons and other institutions. Two collections of "word-songs" by Thomas, *Sounds of the Streets* and *No Mo' Barrio Blues* (Cheverote), were recently released on compact disc.



## ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS

### JONATHAN ROBINSON (Producer / Director)

Jonathan Robinson was born in New York City in 1960. He received a B.A. in Modern History at the University of California, Berkeley, and received an M.F.A. in Live-Action Film Production from the California Institute of the Arts, Valencia. His video on India, cultural difference and the contemporary colonial imagination, *sight unseen: a travelog*, was featured at the 1993 Biennial Exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art, honored with the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's SECA Video Art Award, and named Best Experimental Video at the Image Atlanta Film & Video Festival. Robinson has worked as a freelance editor and script consultant and extensively in the non-profit world of criminal and juvenile justice. Currently, he lives in New Haven, Connecticut, with his wife and two daughters.

### KAREN D. DAVIS (Co-Producer)

Karen D. Davis is a writer, director, producer and media studies instructor based in Berkeley, California. Davis began her professional career in 1992, as the producer of director Lisa Krueger's (*Manny & Lo; Committed*) first narrative film *Best Offer*, which premiered at Sundance. Davis' humorous short documentary about "extreme" gardening in suburbia, *Over the Hedge*, aired on PBS' *P.O.V.* series in 1993 and at more than 40 domestic and international film festivals, earning high praise from the late *New York Times* critic Vincent Canby. Following a two-year Fulbright residence at FEMIS, the National Academy of Film in Paris, France, Davis began teaching at California State University – Monterey Bay, in the Department of Teledramatic Arts and Technology. She is currently scripting a new project.

### KAREN McCABE (Co-Producer)

Karen McCabe produced and directed the documentary *Making Tutti* for ITVS, broadcast nationally on PBS. She has been line producer and production manager on a variety of projects including Luis Valdez' *La Pastorela* for Great Performances on PBS, Wayne Wang's *Joy Luck Club*, Roger Spottiswoode's *And the Band Played On* for HBO, Wim Wenders' *Until the End of the World*, and numerous commercials and music videos.

## ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

*Independent Lens* is a weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 p.m. on PBS. The acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin in *The New Yorker* to write "Watching Independent Lens ... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don't always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn't even know you wanted." Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at [www.pbs.org/independent-lens](http://www.pbs.org/independent-lens). *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

## ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [www.itvs.org](http://www.itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

## ABOUT PBS

PBS, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, is a private, nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 349 public television stations. Serving nearly 90 million people each week, PBS enriches the lives of all Americans through quality programs and education services on noncommercial television, the Internet and other media. More information about PBS is available at <http://www.pbs.org>, the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet.



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